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27 JUL 1973

Honorable John L. McClellan
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

You asked for my views on the disclosure in the Committee's report of budget figures for the National Intelligence Program which I presented to the Committee on 11 July 1973. Disclosure of the total figure in the Committee's report would not in my view present a security problem at this time. It would, however, set a precedent for disclosure of this figure annually. If this were to occur, the annual fluctuations in our total intelligence effort would be revealed. I do not believe it would be in the national interest to disclose this kind of information to foreign nations.

The public disclosure of budget totals for DIA and State/INR have not presented security problems. Public disclosure of total figures for all the programs, however, would reveal a good deal about the distribution of our intelligence resources among different types of intelligence activity, such as clandestine collection, signals intercept, and overhead reconnaissance. More importantly, an annual up-date of such figures would provide insights into the changes and trends in our intelligence programs which could be damaging to intelligence sources and methods.

In a more general sense, I am concerned that public disclosure of total intelligence figures will lead to pressures for further public explanations of the programs for which the monies were appropriated. Any scrutiny of the substance of the programs by other than those authorized could, in my view, be damaging to intelligence sources and methods.

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SECRET

I understand, however, your wish that selected members of the Senate not now privy to such information be advised of the breakdown of figures for national intelligence activities into CIA, DIA, NSA, Army, Navy, Air Force and State Department. I have no objection on security grounds to the disclosure of this breakdown orally to such members on a classified basis.

I am aware, Mr. Chairman, that there are many considerations in determining the optimum position on the public disclosure of intelligence budget figures. The views I have expressed above address only those considerations for which I am primarily responsible under the National Security Act of 1947 -- the protection of intelligence sources and methods. The final determination of what should or should not be publicly disclosed is, in my view, the proper function of the Congress.

Sincerely,

W. E. Colby

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